

issn: 1543-3668 number 16, Spring 2017

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EXHIBIT B

ACSD



Association for Christians  
in Student Development

issn: 1543-3668 number 16, Spring 2017

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## A Survey of Sexual Minorities Who Attend Faith-Based Institutions of Higher Education

Mark A. Yarhouse, PsyD – Regent University

Janet B. Dean, PhD – Asbury University

Stephen P. Stratton, PhD – Asbury Theological Seminary

Michael Lastoria, EdD – Houghton College

Emma K. Bucher, PsyD – Regent University

### Abstract

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This research considers the intersection of sexual identity and religious/spiritual identity in the context of faith-based institutions of higher education. One hundred and sixty students identifying as sexual minorities from fifteen Christian colleges and universities with Association for Christians in Student Development affiliations provided information on their experiences in these unique settings. The findings suggest sexual minorities on faith-based campuses are navigating religious/spiritual aspects of their identity as well as same-sex sexuality and sexual identity development. Both sexuality and religiosity/spirituality are two salient, interacting and multi-level variables for these students, particularly as they relate to doctrinal matters and policies at faith-based institutions of higher education. Campus climate was found to be a complicating factor for those students living at the intersection of these variables, but improving relational conditions, particularly with faculty and staff, were noteworthy in light of past research. Impact on developmental milestones and psychological health were also examined.

## Introduction

In 2009, Cole launched a pivotal discussion about the complexity of living at the convergence of multiple identities related to gender, race, class and sexuality. She used the term “intersectionality” to highlight how awareness, experiences, and opportunities are impacted by living in more than one of these social and cultural categories. More than “either/or,” Cole (2009) noted how the “both/and” of intersectionality contributed to greater complexity for researchers and presumably a more complicated identity development process for those living in these overlapping social worlds.

This current research considers the intersection of sexual identity and religious/spiritual identity in the context of faith-based colleges and universities around the United States. Wentz and Wessel (2011) reported from their qualitative interviews with students from Christian colleges and universities on the identity conflict that exists at this intersection, particularly related to enrollment information, institutional values/culture, and codes of conduct. However, other research with Christian college and university students (Yarhouse, Stratton, Dean & Brooke, 2009) suggested positive aspects exist alongside the conflictual elements of identity and context at the intersection of sexuality and religion/spirituality. Indeed, in a larger sample in the general population, Rosenkrantz, Rostosky, Riggle, and Cook (2016) found qualitative evidence for a positive synergy associated with intersecting religious/spiritual and LGBTQ identities. It seems reasonable to conclude Christian colleges and universities may be unique contexts that can enhance and/or hinder development at the intersection of sexual identity and religious/spiritual identity. Moreover, the timing of this investigation may represent an opportune cultural moment to engage the unique way that these identities overlap and entwine, and faith-based institutions may be ground zero for this pivotal example of intersectionality.

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## Sexuality and Sexual Identity

An emerging body of research suggests sexual identity development or the act of labeling oneself based upon one's sexual preferences among sexual minorities (e.g., lesbian, gay) is actually a developmental process. Identifiable milestone events in sexual identity formation include first awareness of same-sex attraction, first sexual behavior to orgasm, first labeling of oneself as lesbian, gay, or bisexual (LGB), first ongoing same-sex relationship, and so on.

Previous reports on the experiences of sexual minorities on Christian college campuses suggest lower rates of meeting some milestone events, particularly those that are volitional (Yarhouse, Stratton, Dean, & Brooke, 2009). It has been suggested these lower rates may be influenced by a student's

religious beliefs and values informing them whether or not to pursue specific behaviors identified as milestones (e.g., ongoing same-sex relationship). It may also be possible that other factors (e.g., environmental) are at play, or that students are otherwise delayed in achieving specific milestone events.

### Climate and Support

Whatever the case, sexual minority students do not navigate sexual identity milestones in a vacuum. Rather, they do so in the context of a campus community. Previous research of sexual minorities on Christian college campuses suggest the climate is difficult for navigating sexual identity questions (Watson, Campbell, Yarhouse, & Doolin, 2012; Stratton, Dean, Yarhouse, & Lastoria, 2013; Yarhouse et al., 2009). Much of what appears to set the climate are micro-aggressions among fellow students, such as derogatory language about the LGB community or indirect insults (e.g., the use of “that’s so gay” to convey how “stupid” something is) (Watson et al., 2012). When present in ample amounts within a community, it is reasonable to predict an adverse effect upon the psychological health and emotional well-being of sexual minorities in general, and particularly in religiously-affiliated institutions. Health and well-being are also presumably related to campus climate and support.

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This study will examine the general climate in which sexual minority students navigate sexual identity pathways by examining four variables in the process: 1) milestone events in sexual identity development, 2) general impressions of the perception of campus climate, 3) student’s religious attitudes and beliefs regarding sexual orientation and behavior, and 4) self-report of student’s emotional well-being.

### Method

After receiving support from the Association for Christians in Student Development (ACSD) to conduct a study of the experiences of sexual minorities at Christian colleges and universities, student development officers affiliated with the ACSD were approached about functioning as gatekeepers to the study. Over 40 schools initially showed some interest in participating in the study, and of these, 15 schools (representing 10 states) elected to participate. There was broad geographic representation with two participating schools in the Northeast, six in the Midwest, two in the South, three in the Central region, and two in the West. Likewise, participants live broadly across the United States, with 30 from the East (18.8%), 43 from the Midwest (26.9%), 36 from the Central region (22.5%), 32 from the South (20.0%), and 16 from the West (10.0%), with 1 from outside the U.S. and 2 unknown.

Schools first announced the study to their students in their chapel services by a brief verbal announcement and/or a short video presentation. Following the announcement, invitations to participate, along with confirmation the study had been approved by their institution and a link to the online survey, were emailed to all students. Participants in the study required online interaction with a survey<sup>1</sup>; no contact with any campus personnel was required. Due to the longitudinal design of the study, participants provided their names and contact information for follow-up. An initial combined sample of 807 students from these institutions responded to campus-wide requests for students who experience same-sex attraction to complete the online survey.

For the purposes of this study, “sexual minorities” were those “individuals with same-sex attractions or behavior, regardless of self-identification” (Diamond, 2007, p. 142). Of the initial 807 respondents, 24.7% ( $n = 199$ ) refused to participate in the study by directly indicating their refusal, closing out of the survey before providing their names, or not answering any of the qualifying questions. Another 49.9% ( $n = 403$ ) were disqualified from participating because they indicated that they did not experience same-sex attraction ( $n = 374$ ), they did not identify as a Christian ( $n = 13$ ), they did not attend a Christian college or university ( $n = 6$ ), or they gave nonsensical identifying information ( $n = 10$ ). Of those who participated to some degree, 3.1% ( $n = 25$ ) gave their contact information but did not respond to any other item on the survey, and 2.3% ( $n = 20$ ) stopped answering at various points of the survey, completing on average a quarter of the items. The final sample of 160 participants (19.8% of initial responders) completed the entire survey (35 pages in length, electronic format).

The final sample looked similar to the typical population across Christian colleges and universities, except with regard to gender. The gender distribution included 45% female respondents ( $n = 72$ ), 51% male respondents ( $n = 81$ ), and 4% respondents indicating “other” ( $n = 7$ ). Their average reported age was 21.4 years ( $SD = 4.58$ ). Respondents tended to identify as single, never-married (94%). Among the four student classifications, junior and seniors were over-represented (freshmen, 16%, sophomores, 20%, juniors, 22%, seniors, 33%, fifth-year seniors, 2%, and graduate students, 6%). The ethnic/racial make-up of the sample was primarily Caucasian/White (81%) with African-American (7%), Hispanic/Latino (4%), and Asian/Pacific Islander (3%) making up the remainder of the participants.

All participants identified as Christian to be included in the study. When asked about how spiritual and religious they are, participants rated themselves as more spiritual ( $M = 8.46$ ,  $SD = 1.94$ ) than religious ( $M = 6.74$ ,  $SD = 2.22$ ),  $t$  (158) = 10.33,  $p < .001$ .

<sup>1</sup>SurveyMonkey™ with encryption was used to collect the data.

## Survey

The online survey was created by the authors for the purposes of the current study. The survey was based on a previously-published survey used in two national studies of sexual minorities at Christian colleges and universities (Stratton et al., 2013; Yarhouse et al., 2009). The constructed survey included a number of previously published measures.

**Yarhouse Sexual Orientation Thermometers** (Jones & Yarhouse, 2007; Doolin, High, Holt, Atkinson, & Yarhouse, 2011). These two items asked participants to independently rate the degree of other-sex attraction (OSA) and same-sex attraction (SSA) they experience. Using a 10-point Likert scale, the ratings of OSA and SSA vary from 1 = *no attraction* to 10 = *strong attraction*.

**Attitudes about SSA** (Stratton et al., 2013). These 9 attitudinal statements were created to measure attitudes about theological, biological, and sociological belief statements regarding SSA, based on perceived controversial discussions on Christian college and university campuses. Approximately half of the items were written to reflect a perspective intended to be consistent with the worldview of conservative Christian colleges and universities. The remaining items were crafted to reflect a perspective at variance with that worldview to some degree. Participants indicate their degree of agreement with each attitudinal statement on a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 = *strongly disagree* and 5 = *strongly agree*.

**Duke University Religiosity Index** (DUREL; Koenig, Parkerson, & Meador, 1997). This modified seven-item scale measures frequency of church attendance (one item; organizational religiosity, OR), frequency of three personal religious practices (one item; non-organizational religiosity, NOR), and personally motivated spirituality (three items; intrinsic religiosity, IR). Participants indicate the frequency of their religious practices on the first two items using a 6-point Likert scale, ranging from 0 = *never* to 5 = *more than once a week*. Participants also rated their agreement with three attitudinal statements on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = *definitely not true* to 5 = *definitely true of me*. The intrinsic religiosity (IR) score was created by averaging ratings across these three items: “In my life, I experience the presence of the Divine (i.e., God),” “My religious beliefs are what really lie behind my whole approach to life,” and “I try hard to carry my religion over into all other dealings in life.”

Participants were divided into groups based on their reported degree of IR. Those scoring between 12 and 15 were assigned to the *High IR* group ( $n = 181$ , 73.3 percent), those scoring 7 to 11 to the *Moderate IR* group ( $n = 52$ , 21.1 percent), and those scoring 6 or less to the *Low IR* group ( $n = 13$ , 5.3 percent).

In the current study, the DUREL items had a Cronbach's alpha of 0.76, and

the three IR items, which are more similar to one another, had a Cronbach's alpha of .79. IR was moderately correlated to OR with a Pearson product moment correlation coefficient of  $r = 0.38, n = 160, p < .001$ , and to NOR,  $r = 0.47, n = 160, p < .001$ . OR and NOR were fairly correlated,  $r = 0.29, n = 160, p < .001$ . The original DUREL has good test-retest reliability (Storch, Strawser, & Storch, 2004) with good internal reliability, factor structure, and convergent validity (Plante, Vallaey, Sherman, & Wallston, 2002; Storch et al., 2004). It is not assumed separating the one NOR item into three will make a substantial difference, but no empirical testing has confirmed this assumption.

**Counseling Center Assessment of Psychological Symptoms** (CCAPS-34; Center for Collegiate Mental Health, 2012; Locke et al., 2011; Locke et al., 2012). This abbreviated form of the original CCAPS has 34 items that measure psychological symptoms or distress in college students. Participants indicate the degree to which each item describes them on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from *0 = not at all like me* to *4 = extremely like me*. In addition to a Distress Index, its seven subscales include: 1) Depression, 2) Generalized Anxiety, 3) Social Anxiety, 4) Academic Distress, 5) Eating Concerns, 6) Alcohol Use, and 7) Hostility. The subscales of the CCAPS-34 are highly correlated with the full CCAPS-62 (Locke et al., 2011), with correlation coefficients ranging from 0.92 to 0.98 (Center for Collegiate Mental Health, 2012). In addition, initial validation research found the CCAPS-34 to have strong convergent validity, good discrimination power, and fair test-retest stability over 1-week and 2-week intervals (Locke et al., 2012).

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**Ryff Scales of Psychological Well-Being** (Ryff-54; Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Keyes, 1995). The Ryff-54, a shortened form of the original Ryff Scales, assesses six theory-guided dimensions of psychological well-being by asking participants to rate their agreement with each of its 54 items on a 6-point Likert scale, ranging from *1 = strongly disagree* to *6 = strongly agree*. Each subscale consists of 9 items; only 3 subscales were utilized in the current study: 1) Personal Growth, 2) Purpose in Life, and 3) Self-Acceptance.

In the current study, the Ryff-54 subscales had Cronbach's alphas of 0.72 (Personal Growth), 0.80 (Purpose in Life), and 0.89 (Self-Acceptance). Personal Growth was moderately correlated to Self-Acceptance with a Pearson product moment correlation coefficient of  $r = 0.46, n = 160, p < .001$ , and to Purpose in Life,  $r = 0.30, n = 160, p < .001$ . Purpose in Life and Self-Acceptance were moderately correlated,  $r = 0.49, n = 160, p < .001$ . The original Ryff Scales had good test-retest reliability with good internal reliability, factor structure, and convergent validity (Ryff & Keyes, 1995). The Ryff-54 was highly correlated to the original Ryff Scales with correlation coefficients ranging from 0.97 to 0.99 (Ryff & Keyes).

**Milestones of sexual identity development.** The remainder of the interview focused on milestones of sexual identity development, from earliest memories of same-sex attractions to current feelings about one's sexual identity (for review, see Savin-Williams, 1998; Savin-Williams & Diamond, 2000). For purposes of this project, only data concerning the transitions of first same-sex attractions, first same-sex sexual contact, first self-labeling, and first disclosure were analyzed.

## Results

### Sexual Attraction

Current levels of sexual attraction varied among participants, who rated their degree of OSA and SSA on the 10-point Yarhouse Sexual Orientation Thermometers (Jones & Yarhouse, 2007; Doolin et al., 2011). The mean rating of OSA was 4.68 ( $SD = 3.25$ ), indicating moderate attraction to the opposite sex. Only 15.0% of the sample ( $n = 24$ ) reported 1 = *strong OSA*; whereas, 26 participants (16.3%) denied experiencing any OSA. Students also were grouped according to their reported level of OSA. Those who responded 1 to 6 on the scale were categorized as *low OSA* ( $n = 108$ , 67.5%), and those indicating 7 to 10 were placed into the *high OSA* group ( $n = 52$ , 32.5%).

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The mean rating for SSA was 8.09 ( $SD = 2.23$ ), suggesting a fairly strong degree of attraction to the same sex. *No SSA* was indicated by 1.3% of the students ( $n = 2$ ), and *strong SSA* was reported by 40% of the sample ( $n = 64$ ). Participants again were divided into two groups based on their self-reported current degree of SSA. For those who responded 1 to 6 on the scale, they were categorized as *little SSA* ( $n = 34$ ; 21.3%), and those responding with a 7 through 10 were placed in the *high SSA* group ( $n = 126$ ; 78.8%).

### Sexual Milestones

Participants were asked to report the age at which they experienced, if they did so, several milestones of sexual development (e.g., Yarhouse et al., 2009; Dubé & Savin-Williams, 1999). While most participants recalled making an initial attribution they were same-sex attracted (98.8%;  $n = 158$ ), experiencing same-sex feelings (99.4%;  $n = 159$ ), and feeling confused about this attraction (95.0%;  $n = 152$ ) around the average age of 13, other sexual milestones were less common and tended to happen later. See Table 1 for the numbers of students experiencing each milestone, mean ages for each milestone, and the corresponding standard deviations.

**Table 1.** Number and Mean Age for Sexual Milestones.

Sexual Milestones	Mean Age ( <i>SD</i> )	<i>n</i>	Percent of Sample
<i>Same-Sex Milestones</i>			
Awareness of same-sex feelings	12.92 (3.91)	159	99.4%
Initial attribution that I am same-sex attracted	13.08 (4.39)	158	98.8%
Confusion about same-sex feelings	13.26 (3.54)	152	95.0%
Been fondled (breasts or genitals) by someone of the same sex (without orgasm)	16.18 (4.55)	97	60.6%
Fondled (breasts or genitals) someone of the same sex (without orgasm)	16.22 (4.37)	93	58.1%
Intimately/romantically kissed by someone of the same sex	16.79 (3.99)	94	58.8%
First disclosure of same-sex attraction	17.20 (2.83)	130	81.3%
Initial attribution that I am gay/lesbian/bisexual	17.34 (2.35)	135	84.4%
Took on the label of gay privately	17.89 (2.40)	118	73.8%
Same-sex sexual behavior (to orgasm)	18.09 (3.31)	68	42.5%
First same-sex relationship	18.22 (2.68)	64	40.0%
Took on the label of gay publically	19.47 (1.89)	64	40.0%
<i>Opposite-Sex Milestones</i>			
Intimately/romantically kissed by someone of the opposite sex	15.53 (3.18)	99	61.9%
First opposite-sex relationship	15.74 (3.07)	106	66.3%
Been fondled (breasts or genitals) by someone of the opposite sex (without orgasm)	15.77 (4.06)	74	46.3%
Fondled (breasts or genitals) someone of the opposite sex (without orgasm)	15.97 (3.85)	69	43.1%
Opposite-sex sexual behavior (to orgasm)	17.51 (3.09)	51	31.9%

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When divided into two groups by sexual attraction, only three milestones varied by the level of attraction. The *high SSA group* ( $n = 124$ ;  $M = 12.71$ ,  $SD = 4.44$ ) reported an earlier age at which they made an initial attribution of being SSA as compared to the *low SSA group* ( $n = 34$ ;  $M = 14.41$ ,  $SD = 3.96$ ),  $t(156) = 2.03$ ,  $p = 0.045$ ; however, the *high SSA* students ( $n = 77$ ;  $M = 17.22$ ,  $SD = 3.70$ ) tended to intimately kiss someone of the same sex at a later age than the *low SSA* students ( $n = 17$ ;  $M = 14.82$ ,  $SD = 4.76$ ),  $t(92) = -2.29$ ,  $p = 0.024$ . These groups also varied in when they first disclosed their SSA, with the *low SSA* students ( $n = 25$ ;  $M = 16.20$ ,  $SD = 3.07$ ) typically sharing this attraction earlier than the *high SSA* students ( $n = 105$ ;  $M = 17.44$ ,  $SD = 2.73$ ),  $t(128) = -1.99$ ,  $p = 0.049$ .

#### Private and Public Sexual Identity

When asked about their sexual identity labels ( $n = 160$ ), participants showed significant differences in how they identify publically and privately,  $X^2(9) = 70.2$ ,  $p < 0.001$ . Half of the students reported having a public identity as heterosexual ( $n = 80$ , 50.0%), yet only 5.6% ( $n = 9$ ) identify as such privately. Conversely, only 20% ( $n = 32$ ) publically claim to be lesbian or gay, whereas, 46.9% ( $n = 75$ ) hold this identity privately. Even so, more students than statistically expected held a consistent identity of lesbian/gay ( $n = 32$ ; 20.0%) or bisexual ( $n = 11$ ; 6.9%) in both public and private spheres<sup>2</sup>. See Table 2 for frequencies and percentages.

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**Table 2.** Frequencies of Public and Private Sexual Identity Labels ( $n = 160$ ).

	R	Public Sexual Identity						Total		
		Heterosexual		Bisexual		Lesbian/ Gay		Other/ Questioning		
Sexual Identity		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n
		8	5.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1	0.6%	9
Heterosexual		28	17.5%	11	6.9% <sup>a</sup>	0	0.0% <sup>b</sup>	7	4.4%	46
Bisexual		23	14.4% <sup>b</sup>	1	0.6% <sup>b</sup>	32	20.0% <sup>a</sup>	19	11.9%	75
Lesbian / Gay		21	13.1%	1	0.6%	0	0.0% <sup>b</sup>	8	5.0%	30
Other/Questioning		Total n	80	13	32	35				

<sup>a</sup>Higher frequency than expected, <sup>b</sup>Lower frequency than expected

<sup>2</sup>While the aggregate rows are clearly significantly different, cell differences identify if the difference between rows is due to one cell value in particular. Non-significance suggests that no cell was more different than what would have been expected by the difference in the rows.

### Same-Sex Sexual Attitudes

Students were asked to rate their degree of agreement with several attitudes about same-sex attraction and behavior on a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5 (with 1 being *Strongly Disagree* and 5 being *Strongly Agree*). See Table 3 for means and standard deviations. When the last three items were reversed scored so high scores across all items would represent a more gay-affirming mindset, the average attitudes score was 3.18 ( $SD = 0.72$ ), suggesting more of a neutral to very slight agreement to this perspective.

Students' degree of intrinsic religiosity was related to their sexual attitudes, with 8 of the 9 statements showing a significant difference between students low in IR and those high in IR. As follows, the overall attitudinal score differed between these two groups,  $t(152) = 4.72, p < .001$ , with students low in IR ( $M = 3.55, SD = 0.51$ ) being slightly more gay-affirming and nontraditional in their views than students high in IR ( $M = 3.00, SD = 0.74$ ), but still very close to a neutral position.

**Table 3. Means and Standard Deviations for SSA Attitudes by Level of Intrinsic Religiosity ( $n = 160$ ).** \* $p \leq .05$ , \*\* $p \leq .01$ , \*\*\* $p \leq .001$

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Sexual Attitudes	Total Sample $M (SD)$	Low IR $M (SD)$ ( $n = 51$ )	High IR $M (SD)$ ( $n = 109$ )	$t (df)$
Persons can choose who they are sexually attracted to.	1.83 (1.07)	1.59 (0.78)	1.95 (1.16)	-1.99 (158)*
Sexual behavior between members of the same gender is morally acceptable.	3.29 (1.49)	3.94 (1.27)	2.98 (1.49)	3.98 (157)***
Being attracted sexually to members of the same gender is morally acceptable.	4.15 (1.05)	4.51 (0.81)	3.98 (1.11)	3.41 (130)***
Monogamous sexual relationships between members of the same gender can be blessed [or receive God's grace and love].	3.50 (1.51)	4.12 (1.78)	3.21 (1.56)	4.07 (127)***
Same-sex experimentation among adolescents to try out this form of sexual expression is morally acceptable.	2.67 (1.31)	3.35 (1.23)	2.35 (0.92)	4.82 (158)***
Persons who experience same-sex attraction could have been born with this predisposition.	4.10 (1.17)	4.47 (0.73)	3.92 (1.30)	3.38 (153)***
Experience [environment] plays a greater role in the development of same-sex attraction than does biology.	2.74 (1.12)	3.35 (1.23)	2.35 (1.23)	-2.17 (157)*
Persons who experience same-sex attraction can change this aspect of their attractions to the opposite sex.	1.88 (1.07)	1.53 (0.86)	2.05 (1.12)	-3.20 (125)**
Persons can live a sexually chaste life (abstinent) [celibate life] while they have same-sex attraction.	4.18 (1.06)	4.04 (1.08)	4.25 (1.05)	-1.19 (156)

## Campus Climate

When asked how they would describe their campuses' view of same-sex attraction, behavior, and the person who experiences same-sex attraction (on a scale from 1 to 5 in which 1 was *unacceptable* and 5 was *acceptable*), respondents reported a mean score of 1.5 ( $SD = 0.81$ ) for same-sex sexual behavior, suggesting little to no acceptability of such behavior. While participants viewed their campuses as not being particularly accepting of same-sex behavior, same-sex attraction ( $M = 2.5$ ,  $SD = 1.81$ ), and individuals who identify as having same-sex attraction ( $M = 2.5$ ,  $SD = 1.11$ ), they viewed their campuses as being significantly less accepting of same-sex sexual behavior than of the attraction and the persons with that attraction,  $F(2, 318) = 125.23, p < .001$ .

When asked about the frequencies of negative remarks, jokes that "put down" sexual minorities, or use of the term "gay" inappropriately heard on campus, 60% of participants indicated they have never heard course instructors make negative comments and 66.9% indicated they never heard staff members make such comments. However, the reverse was true in the case for peers making negative comments: 64.4% of participants indicated they had heard other students make negative comments four or more times during the previous year. The Chi square analysis,  $X^2(4) = 11.60, p = 0.021$ , found an overall difference in distribution, but there were no significant cell differences (see Table 4).

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**Table 4.** *Frequencies of Negative Comments Heard on Campus.*

	0 Instances n (%)	1 Instance n (%)	2 Instances n (%)	3 Instances n (%)	4+ Instances n (%)
Course Instructors	96 (60.0%)	32 (20.0%)	14 (8.8%)	7 (4.4%)	11 (6.9%)
Staff Members	107 (66.9%)	23 (14.4%)	13 (8.1%)	10 (6.3%)	7 (4.4%)
Students	12 (7.5%)	12 (7.5%)	17 (10.6%)	16 (10.0%)	103 (64.4%)

When asked about what typically happened if a student made a derogatory remark or told a joke that "put down" people who experience same-sex attraction, 81% of participants indicated they have never heard negative remarks made in the presence of course instructors and 66.9% indicated they never heard negative remarks made in the presence of staff members. When such comments were made in the presence of other students, 47.5% said the other student typically did not challenge the statement. The Chi square analysis,  $X^2(3) = 14.65, p = 0.002$ , again found overall differences in frequencies, but there were no significant cell differences (see Table 5).

**Table 5.** *Frequencies of Responses Witnessed to Negative Comments Heard on Campus (n = 160).*

	Statements were not made in their presence. n (%)	They typically agreed. n (%)	They typically did not challenge. n (%)	They typically did challenge. n (%)
Course Instructors	81 (50.1%)	12 (7.5%)	46 (28.8%)	21 (13.1%)
Staff Members	107 (66.9%)	10 (6.3%)	32 (28.8%)	11 (6.9%)
Students	11 (6.9%)	60 (37.5%)	76 (47.5%)	12 (7.5%)

When asked about the participants' awareness of potential campus resources for sexual identity, same-sex attraction, and related issues (n = 160), about a third of the sample indicated they were aware of various resources on campus. See Table 6 for more specifics. While some participants reported they were aware of resources, much fewer indicated they would actually utilize the resources. More students have used the counseling center (33.8%, n = 54) or have spoken to a faculty or staff person (28.7%, n = 46) than have used residence life (9.4%, n = 15), campus ministries (10%, n = 16), or student development (3.8%, n = 6). The department least known as a possible resource to students was student development (54.4%, n = 87), although many participants were also unaware of the other resources. The fewest number of participants were unaware of the counseling center (12.9%, n = 20).

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**Table 6.** *Frequencies of Awareness of Campus Resources for SSA (n = 160).*

	Counseling Center n (%)	Residence Life n (%)	Campus Ministries n (%)	Faculty or Staff (%)	Student Development n (%)
Not aware of this area as a resource	20 (12.9)	66 (41.3)	60 (37.7)	34 (21.3)	87 (54.4)
Aware of this area as a resource	62 (38.8)	66 (41.3)	63 (39.4)	51 (31.9)	56 (35.0)
Aware of this area as a resource & would use it	24 (15.0)	13 (8.1)	21 (13.1)	29 (18.1)	11 (6.9)
Have used this as a resource	54 (33.8)	15 (9.4)	16 (10.0)	46 (28.7)	6 (3.8)

The students ( $n = 160$ ) were asked how satisfied they were with the social support they received both in general and, more specifically, in regard to their same-sex attraction. They ranked their social support on a Likert scale ranging from 1 = *Strongly Disagree* to 6 = *Strongly Agree*. Participants reported feeling more general support as compared to support regarding same-sex attraction across all social relationships, except for their LGB-identified friends who supported them similarly whether it be in general issues ( $M = 5.08$ ,  $SD = 1.24$ ) or in issues related to their SSA ( $M = 4.99$ ,  $SD = 1.29$ ),  $t$  (53) = 1.12,  $p = 0.267$  (see Table 7).

**Table 7.** *Mean Ratings and Standard Deviations of General Social Support Versus Support Regarding Same-Sex Attraction (n = 160).*

	General Social Support <i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	SSA Support <i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	<i>t</i> (df)
Family	4.61 (1.56)	3.06 (1.81)	10.53 (156)***
Church	3.93 (1.66)	2.68 (1.61)	9.75 (156)***
Faculty or Staff	4.51 (1.43)	3.22 (1.43)	10.25 (156)***
Heterosexual Friends	5.18 (1.24)	4.38 (1.57)	6.58 (155)***
LGB-Identified Friends	5.08 (1.24)	4.99 (1.29)	1.12 (153)

\*\*\* $p \leq .001$

When asked to describe their relationship to campus policies regarding sexuality and sexual behavior, 38.5% ( $n = 60$ ) indicated they came to a Christian university but quietly disagree with the policies, 30.8% ( $n = 48$ ) indicated they came to a Christian university because they agreed with the existing campus policies, 16.7% ( $n = 26$ ) indicated they came to a Christian university but vocally disagree with the policies, and 8.3% ( $n = 13$ ) indicated they came to a Christian university but were unaware of what the policies were. These responses were compared to the participants' levels of intrinsic religiosity, and IR was found to be correlated with opinions about campus policies,  $F$  (3, 156) = 9.71,  $p < .001$ . Those who indicated they came to a Christian university but vocally disagree with the policies had the lowest average levels of intrinsic religiosity ( $M = 3.60$ ,  $SD = 1.01$ ), whereas those who indicated they came to a Christian university because they agreed with the existing campus policies had the highest average levels of intrinsic religiosity ( $M = 4.54$ ,  $SD = 0.47$ ). Those who indicated they came to a Christian university but quietly disagreed with the policies had an average intrinsic religiosity score of 3.97 ( $SD = 0.89$ ), and those who indicated they came to a Christian university but were unaware of the policies had an average intrinsic

religiosity score of 4.04 ( $SD = 0.75$ ). Bonferroni post-hoc analyses showed those who indicated they came to a Christian university because they agreed with the existing campus policies reported significantly higher levels of intrinsic religiosity those who vocally disagreed with the policies,  $p = .001$ , and those who quietly disagreed with the policies,  $p < .001$ . The participants' relationship to campus policy was also compared to the participant's level of sexual attraction (see Table 8).

**Table 8.** *Mean Sexual Attraction Scores and Campus Policies Regarding Sexuality and Sexual Behavior (n = 160).*

	Opposite-Sex Attraction M (SD)	Same-Sex Attraction M (SD)
Agree with policies	5.08 (2.96)	7.28 (2.12)*
Unaware of policies	4.33 (3.75)	8.07 (2.87)
Quietly disagree with policies	4.33 (3.19)	8.58 (1.87)*
Vocally disagree with policies	4.94 (3.61)	8.42 (2.36)

\*OSA and SSA significantly different at  $p < 0.05$ .

### Psychological Health

There were no significant differences by level of SSA (high and low SSA) on any subscale of psychological symptoms (depression, anxiety, academic distress, etc.) (see Table 9). In addition, while about half of the subscale scores fell in the Mild range, none fell in the Elevated Score range as determined by the Center for Collegiate Mental Health (2012).

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**Table 9.** *Mean Scale Scores of Psychological Symptoms by Same-Sex Sexual Attraction (SSA) (n = 160).*

	Low SSA (n = 34) M(SD)	High SSA (n = 126) M(SD)
Depression	1.22 (0.97) <sup>a</sup>	1.36 (1.03) <sup>a</sup>
Generalized Anxiety	1.37 (1.02) <sup>a</sup>	1.36 (1.03) <sup>a</sup>
Social Anxiety	1.72 (1.06) <sup>a</sup>	1.85 (0.96) <sup>a</sup>
Academic Distress	1.19 (1.09)	1.42 (1.08)
Eating Concerns	0.87 (1.01)	0.97 (1.21)
Hostility	0.55 (0.62)	0.76 (0.92) <sup>a</sup>
Alcohol Use	0.25 (0.39)	0.58 (1.03)

<sup>a</sup> Scores fell in the Mild range.

Further analysis investigated the relationship between intrinsic religiosity and psychological symptoms in this sample. Those students with lower intrinsic religiosity reported significantly higher levels of depression, generalized anxiety, social anxiety, academic distress, eating concerns, and alcohol use than did those with higher intrinsic religiosity (see Table 10). Again, while many of the subscale scores fell in the Mild range, only one, depression in those with low intrinsic religiosity, fell in the Elevated Score range as determined by the Center for Collegiate Mental Health (2012).

**Table 10.** *Mean Scale Scores of Psychological Symptoms by Intrinsic Religiosity (IR) (n = 160).*

	Low IR (n = 51) M(SD)	High IR (n = 109) M(SD)
Depression **	1.85 (1.07) <sup>b</sup>	1.23 (0.98) <sup>a</sup>
Generalized Anxiety *	1.97 (1.00) <sup>a</sup>	1.48 (1.02) <sup>a</sup>
Social Anxiety *	2.20 (1.04) <sup>a</sup>	1.74 (0.96) <sup>a</sup>
Academic Distress **	1.88 (0.97) <sup>a</sup>	1.27 (1.07)
Eating Concerns *	1.37 (1.23) <sup>a</sup>	0.87 (1.15)
Hostility	0.97 (1.04) <sup>a</sup>	0.67 (0.82)
Alcohol Use **	0.96 (1.16) <sup>a</sup>	0.42 (0.87)

<sup>a</sup> Scores fell in the Mild range. <sup>b</sup> Scores fell in the Elevated range.

National average 1.58 for depression

\* $p \leq .05$ , \*\* $p \leq .01$ , \*\*\* $p \leq .001$  for differences between IR groups.

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## Discussion

The findings from the present study may be best understood in the context of a few other surveys that have previously been conducted with sexual minority students who attend faith-based institutions of higher education (Stratton et al., 2013; Yarhouse et al., 2009). These include findings suggesting sexual minorities on faith-based campuses may value the religious/spiritual aspects of their identity and may hold these values more centrally than those who attend other institutions. However, even from this point of commonality, diversity can still be found. We organize our discussion around the three areas of sexuality and sexual identity, climate/support, and psychological health.

### Sexuality and Sexual Identity

The majority of participants reported experiencing strong levels of same-sex attraction with some also experiencing varying levels of opposite-sex attraction.

For example, over two-thirds of the participants reported strong levels of same-sex attraction, while a quarter of participants indicated they experience strong levels of opposite-sex attraction. These findings indicate sexual feelings for the opposite sex vary amongst those who experience same-sex attraction, which may stand in contradiction to cultural pulls labeling people in distinct sexual categories without nuance. Further, participants tended to identify as spiritual rather than religious, which is in concert with previous literature (Dahl, 2011). Participants may tend to engage in individual spiritual practices rather than the traditional religious services that have been historically condemning of their sexual identity.

Participants in this study appear to be navigating sexual identity development that is in some ways similar to what is seen in the broader literature, but there appear to be differences in milestones that require choice or volition. For example, most respondents did not report adopting a public gay identity, engaging in same-sex behavior to orgasm, or entering into an ongoing same-sex relationship. This is similar in some ways to previous reports of milestone events among sexual minorities on Christian college campuses (Stratton et al., 2013; Yarhouse et al., 2009).

There is quite a lot of diversity in public and private labels associated with a sexual minority identity as LGB. This is likely related to the milestone events noted above and may reflect difficulties in feeling “safe” to be known by a sexual identity label in a public way at a Christian college. The matching or non-matching of an individual’s public and private identities is an aspect of the developmental nature of the sexual identity process and may be an indicator of the surrounding climate as well (i.e., one being less likely to “match” LGB identities if environment is perceived as non-affirming).

In terms of attitudes toward same-sex attraction and behavior, our sample was remarkably diverse in their views. In terms of mean scores, however, they appear to reflect more permissive or gay affirming positions with, again, a significant amount of diversity of attitudes reflected.

#### Climate and Support

In terms of campus climate, our sample did not, on average, view their campus as a place in which students who experience same-sex attraction are viewed positively or supported. Same-sex attraction, behavior, and the person were all, on average, on the “unacceptable” side of a 1 to 5 scale, with a difference between the person/attraction and the behavior. Of potential further interest is the fact that not even the person was viewed as acceptable.

How is climate established? We can consider others who are on campus as well as campus policies. When it comes to faculty, staff, and other students, it appears as though negative comments that likely set campus climate are heard primarily

from other students (rather than faculty or staff). In terms of policy, we see great variability in attitudes toward existing campus policies, suggesting this sample is not a monolithic group when it comes to policies at a Christian college.

Participants reported they received the most general support from their heterosexual friends and the most support regarding same-sex attraction from their LGB-identified friends, which seems logical. Unfortunately, they received the least amount of support, both in general and in regard to their attraction, from their churches. Additionally, participants received more general support from all social groups in comparison to support regarding their same-sex attraction. This indicates that all social groups, including LGB-identified friends, need assistance providing empathy and compassion toward those investigating their sexual identity. The church, in particular, appears to provide limited support to sexual minorities, as participants listed this group as lowest both in providing general support and in providing support regarding same-sex attraction.

### Psychological Health

Participants in our study reported mild psychological symptoms, including depression, anxiety, and social anxiety. These scores were not in the Elevated range (with the exception of depression among those who also scored low in intrinsic religiosity). This is an interesting finding in light of concerns for the psychological well-being of sexual minorities nationwide and especially in religiously-affiliated institutions.

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### Limitations

Limitations to this study include the convenience nature of the sample. Also, a significant difference between this study and previous studies of sexual minorities as Christian college campuses was the lack of anonymity to participate in this study. It is unclear whether respondents would be representative of students who did not wish to share their identity or of sexual minority students more broadly.

### Conclusions

The findings from the present study suggest sexual minorities on faith-based campuses are navigating religious/spiritual aspects of their identity as well as same-sex sexuality and sexual identity development. Our findings suggest sexual minorities on Christian campuses are a unique blend of persons for whom sexuality and religiosity/spirituality are two very prominent interacting and multi-level variables, particularly as they relate to doctrinal matters and policies at faith-based institutions of higher education.

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